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ABSTRACT

A dual workshop/questionnaire approach was used in a needs assessment of adult basic education (ABE) students conducted in Prince George's County, Maryland, in spring 1980. The workshop advanced and clarified the concept of career development to teaching and administrative staff. Participants completed a needs assessment questionnaire according to their view of ABE students' needs. Another questionnaire assessed students' views of their career development needs. From 793 students in the program, 760 usable responses were gathered. With the exception of one item, 50% or more of the sample members felt they wanted help in all areas identified on the questionnaire. Study results supported the importance of career development in ABE to meet employability needs of the ABE population. Students most wanted to know what they do well and then how to get through the information on careers, training, and financial aid. Evidence was also provided that career development is worthy of emphasis in ABE programming. (YLB)

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An Assessment of the Career Development Needs of ABE Students In Prince George's County, Maryland

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Abstract

Adult basic education (ABE) provides instruction in basic communicative and computational skills to persons functioning below high school graduation competency. The purpose of ABE is to help uneducated persons become employable, productive, and responsible citizens. Accomplishing this purpose means supplementing basic skill instruction with content directly related to this purpose. Career development is a content area which warrants inclusion in ABE programming. Before it can be included, however, ABE students' career development needs should be assessed.

This paper discusses the results of a career development needs assessment project done in a major ABE program in the state of Maryland. The project employed a dual workshop/questionnaire approach. A workshop was used to advance and clarify the concept of career development to teaching and administrative staff. A questionnaire was utilized to assess students' views of their career development needs. Results of 760 usuable responses and implications for ABE programming are discussed.

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Introduction

Adult basic education is a dilemma. Its ambitious purpose of helping uneducated persons become employable, productive, and responsible citizens provided the reason for the federal government's willingness to fund the program. It was thought that providing the opportunity for adults to continue their education at no cost through the high school level of competency would result in benefits to the government through decreased welfare payments and increased tax income.

The emphasis in adult basic education then is on providing instruction in basic communicative and computational skills through the secondary level. But, is that enough to accomplish the purpose of ABE?

Research in adult basic education shows that basic skill instruction is not effective in changing a variety of attitudes and personality variables associated with employability, productivity, and responsibility. (Kent, 1973; Moore, 1970; Terrazas, 1977). It would seem then that if instruction in basic skills does not get at these variables, other content needs to be brought into ABE programming.

Career development in part or in total is a content area worthy of inclusion in the ABE curricula. Career development encompasses life planning, self awareness, career awareness, decision making, and job seeking and keeping. It can be offered through self-administering materials, general curriculum infusion, workshops, individual and group counseling, and short and long courses. Research is available that shows that career development in a variety of these forms can significantly affect self-concept, locus of control, work attitudes, and decision

making, goal setting and life planning skills (Jones, 1979; Patton, 1974; Thomas, 1973; Thornton, 1978; von Esch, 1978; Willensky, 1979).

Before generating a plan for offering career development to ABE students, a needs assessment should be done. Assessing ABE students' career development needs has been done through analysis of secondary data (Iowa Sate Dept. of Public Instruction, 1974), door to door interviews (Bellinger, Peck, Harrison, and Sanderson, 1976), questionnaires (Silvester, 1976), and workshops (Williams and Habiola, 1977). A needs assessment of ABE students conducted in Prince George's County, Maryland in the spring of 1980 utilized a dual workshop/questionnaire approach.

Needs Assessment Survey

The assessment of ABE students' needs in Prince George's County, Maryland was conducted to accomplish two goals. The first goal was to advance and clarify the concept of career development to the teaching and administrative staff of the program. This goal was approached through a workshop for ABE center coordinators and teachers. The workshop presentation included a discussion of the definition of adult basic education as it relates to career development, some background into career development, and the available ways of providing career development to the ABE program's students. Workshop participants completed a needs assessment questionnaire according to their view of ABE students' needs. The evaluations of the workshop were positive. Generally comments expressed satisfaction with and appreciation for the presentation and participants' newly acquired knowledge of career development.

The second goal was to assess the career development needs of students in the ABE program. This goal was approached through a questionnaire based

in part on the questionnaire used for K-12 students by the Maryland State Department of Education in developing the Five-Year Plan for Career Education. The questionnaire was prescriptive-subjective in that its content was prescribed by the accepted content of career development and it resulted in subjective data regarding the areas in which students felt they needed the most help.

The questionnaire was administered by teachers during the first week of second semester classes.

Results

From the 793 students in the program, 760 usable responses were gathered. Table 1 outlines the demographic characteristics of the sample. Table 2 presents the results of the survey. It can be seen that with the exception of one item, 50% or more of the sample felt they wanted help in all areas identified on the questionnaire.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample
n=760

Race	Black	42%
	White	42
	Asian-American	7
	Spanish-American	4
	American Indian	1
	Other	4
Sex	Female	62%
	Male	38
Age	16-25	49%
	26-35	27
	36-50	21
	51-65	2
	66 or over	1
Marital status	Single	46%
	Married	45
	Divorced/separated	8
	Widowed	1
Employment status	Employed	60%
	Unemployed	25
	Housewife/husband	14
	Retired	1
Education	10-12 years of school	47%
	7-9 years of school	37
	high school or more	11
	0-6 years of school	5
	0-3 months of adult education	78%
	4-6 months	11
	over one year	7
	6-12 months	4

Table 2

What students most wanted help with
n=760

	Yes	No	Don't Know
To know what I can do well (6)	76%	19%	5%
To know where I can go in schools and community for help with my career (14)	70	22	8
To know where to get job training (apprenticeships, government programs, military, etc.) (15)	69	23	8
To know how to choose a good training program for me (16)	69	23	8
To know more about the world of work (13)	65	27	8
To know about financial help for college and other kinds of education for adults (17)	64	29	7
To understand my limitations (7)	63	27	10
To understand how my feelings and attitudes affect my ability to get and keep a job (23)	63	29	8
To know about local jobs that would suit me (22)	62	29	9
To know how to prepare for a career (1)	61	27	12
To be more understanding of people whose ideas are different from mine (10)	61	30	9
To know how to interview for jobs (25)	61	32	7
To study what it's like to work in careers that interest me (19)	60	26	14
To know myself better (5)	59	33	8
To know how to apply for jobs (24)	59	34	7
To state my opinions (11)	58	31	11
To learn how other people see me (8)	56	34	10
To like myself better (9)	57	35	8
To learn how to make decisions (20)	56	35	9
To make a plan for my career that allows for change in me and the working world (4)	55	30	15

To know how my career affects my leisure and family life (18)	55	35	10
To know how people close to me affect my choice of a career (21)	53	36	11
To talk to a counselor about career plans (2)	50	35	15
To understand the changing roles of men and women (12)	50	38	12
To get my family involved in my career plans (3)	29	57	14

Note: The number in parentheses is the questionnaire item number.

Implications

The results of this study support the importance of career development in adult basic education. Students in this study most wanted to know what they do well. Secondly, they wanted to know how to get through the information explosion regarding careers, training, and financial aid. These results indicate that students feel a substantial need to know where and how to get information and how to deal with systems. Thus, not only is career development important in meeting the legislative intent of ABE but it is crucial to meeting the employability needs of the ABE population.

More importantly, the results of the study provide evidence that career development is worthy of emphasis in adult basic education programming. It is important enough to students to warrant emphasis in curriculum content and in staffing. Career development can be offered in a variety of forms. It is unlikely that programming for career development will be effective without special staffing. Teachers already busy with presenting basic skill instruction find little time available to learn about career development

and generate programs for offering it to students. Thus, additional staffing is necessary. ABE programs are now moving toward hiring counselors in addition to teachers. Counseling staffs are best suited to providing career development programming in addition to personal and group counseling. Counseling staffs can provide self-administering materials, workshops on phases of career development, and referrals to employment services and educational institutions for interest and aptitude testing, job counseling, and career planning courses.

Conclusion

The purpose of adult basic education is to help the uneducated people of America become employable, productive, and responsible citizens. This purpose can be accomplished through the provision of career development in addition to basic skill instruction. This needs assessment substantiates and clarifies the importance of career development to ABE students. Furthermore, the results suggest that career development is deserving of emphasis in adult basic education programming and staffing. Career development is important in meeting the goals of ABE, in accomplishing the purpose for ABE funding, and in meeting the needs of ABE students.

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